

Foucault and Post-Colonial Theory

University of Oregon
Winter 2023

Instructor: Sean Long
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Some of the most controversial issues in contemporary American politics involve questions of reproductive rights, healthcare, the death penalty, and more generally the regulation of our bodies and of our life and death. This class attempts to situate those questions into larger philosophical debates over what is called biopolitics. Theories on biopolitics explore the ways in which modern societies regulate the health, productivity, and reproduction of the population, while at the same time neglecting and even disposing of groups that are seen as deviant or unnecessary.

This class will introduce you to those philosophical discussions, exploring major works in the theory of biopower and, more recently, the notion of necropolitics that has emerged out of post-colonial theory. Moreover, it will help situate these larger questions within specific contexts including medical racism and food production. While discussing these theories, there will be a consistent focus on applying them to real-world situations.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The course grade will consist of a term paper and a final, as well as participation in class. The midterm will involve a series of short answer questions which will be posted one week before they are due. The paper will be approximately 8-10 pages and will encourage you to apply theories discussed in class to a real-world issue of your choice related to reproduction, health, violence, etc.

I encourage participation in class, however given and some people's natural tendency to not want to talk in large groups, participation will include coming to the instructor's office hours and email correspondence. Thus, it is really a measure of engagement, rather than how much you talk. There will be no additional assignments, such as quizzes or weekly assignments.

Grade Breakdown: Midterm: 40%, with option for revision
Final Paper: 40%
Participation: 20%

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Introducing and Applying Biopolitics

Week 1: Eugenics and Race

Monday, Jan 9: Introduction to Course, Neil Irvin Painter's *The History of White People*, Chapters 17 and 18

Wednesday, Jan 11: Neil Irvin Painter's *The History of White People*, Chapters 19, 20, and 28

Week 2: Medical Racism

Monday, Jan 16: **No Class**

Wednesday, Jan 18: Harriet Washington's *Medical Apartheid*, Introduction, Chapters 7 and 13 (*stop at 468*)

Michel Foucault

Week 3: Discipline and Punish

Monday, Jan 23: Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, 1-31, 135-170

Monday, Jan 25: Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, 170-228

Week 4: Foucault and Biopolitics I

Monday, Jan 30: Michel Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended*, pages 1-42

Wednesday, Feb 1: Michel Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended*, pages 43-84

Week 5: Foucault and Biopolitics II

Monday, Feb 6: Michel Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended*, 239-263

Wednesday, Feb 8: Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, pages 131-145

Colonialism, Capitalism, and Necropolitics

Week 6: Concealing Violence

Monday, Feb 13: Ursula LeGuin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"
Timothy Prachirat's *Every Twelve Seconds*, Chapters 1 and 2

Wednesday, Feb 15: Timothy Prachirat's *Every Twelve Seconds*, Chapters 8 and 9

February 17: Midterm due

Week 7: Controlling Reproduction

Monday, Feb 20: Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, Introduction, Chapter 2

Wednesday, Feb 23: Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, Chapters 3 and 5

Week 8: Colonialism

Monday, Feb 27: Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence"

Wednesday, March 1: Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence" (continued), "Conclusion"

Week 9: Necropolitics I

Monday, March 6: Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics*, Introduction, Chapter 1

Wednesday, March 8: Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics*, Chapter 2

Week 10: Necropolitics II

Monday, March 13: Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics*, Chapter 3, Conclusion

Wednesday, March 15: Review and Discussion

March 22: Final paper due

MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT

Please choose one question from each of the following three sections, for a total of three questions. Then, provide approximately a full page response to each. Focus should be paid primarily to a close engagement with the ideas and conceptual precision in your answer.

Part One: Discipline

- A. What is "normalizing society" for Foucault and how do the disciplines feature into that concept?
- B. What is the relationship between norms and deviancy, according to Foucault? How is this produced through the disciplines?

Part Two: Biopolitics

- A. Why does Foucault conclude that all forms of biopolitics must involve racism?
- B. What is the relationship between biopolitics and "the massacre" for Foucault?

Part Three: Application

Please, analyze one of the following, drawing on at least one concept from Foucault (ex: the disciplines, biopower, normalization, etc.), in order to demonstrate the applicability or inapplicability of the concept:

- A. Racist medical experimentation
- B. The eugenics movement
- C. IQ testing

D. Racial health disparities

FINAL PAPER PROMPT

The course description discusses the importance of political issues including abortion, the death penalty, and animal agriculture, while we have discussed issues of eugenics, medical racism, and biopower more broadly. Please select one contemporary political issue of your choice and analyze the extent to which that issue is consistent with the theories of population management and biopower discussed in this course. What does such an analysis tell us about the issue you have selected?

Please select your issue of choice and let me know what you are planning to write on by March 1.

Note: The issue does not have to be limited to the United States or even Western context. The goal is to essentially have you apply these theories to a real-world situation, leveraging these ideas to develop a more nuanced understanding of a given situation.